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WLCI Update

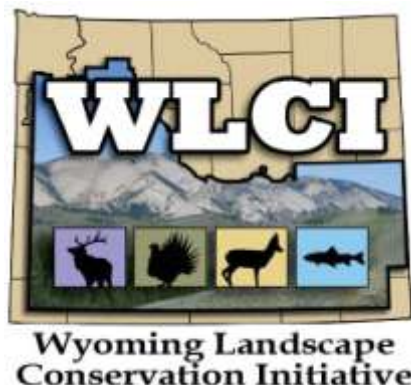
The mission of the WLCI is to conduct a long-term science-based program to assess and enhance the quality and quantity of aquatic and terrestrial habitats at a landscape scale in southwest Wyoming, based on community partnerships and facilitation of responsible development.

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Daily management and operation of WLCI is based out of the BLM High Desert District Office. If you are interested in working with WLCI or have comments, please use the information listed below.

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Conservation Action Plan

The WLCI is developing a Conservation Action Plan (CAP) that will be used to guide on-the-ground actions across southwest Wyoming. The idea for the CAP arose from the desire to align various WLCI conservation and science goals and objectives. The CAP builds on common conservation priorities identified by WLCI partners and forms a "road map" for WLCI conservation actions during the next 5 years with the following benefits:

- Provide WLCI conservation priorities and objectives.
- Focus and transform local input, knowledge and expertise into strategic conservation objectives.
- Direct science activities and data acquisition.
- Transfer site-specific goals and objectives to achieve landscape-level accomplishments.
- Establish measurable objectives and outcomes.
- Enhance and improve funding opportunities.
- Define where decisions and guidance are needed for WLCI committees and teams.

Several steps have been used to develop the CAP, including:

1) preliminary identification of Local Project Development Team (LPDT) priorities, issues, and objectives; 2) an iterative process to share information and receive additional input

from LPDTs, land management specialists and planners, the WLCI Executive Committee (EC), and other WLCI teams; 3) alignment with the USGS Integrated Assessment, which provides information that supports planning efforts; 4) refinement of the issues, objectives, indicators, and metrics, presented in a map product; and 5) providing a final, written CAP document.

For the initial refinement process, WLCI Coordination Team members Mark Bellis and Jim Wasseen met with WLCI partners. They discussed each organization's goals and priorities in detail; partners provided associated maps, when available. In addition to these meetings, Mark and Jim visited identified priority areas and collected GPS locations and photos. The meetings provided all WLCI partners equal input in development of the CAP. Their involvement was intended to give them ownership of the process. The meetings also created an opportunity for the Coordination Team

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An aspen stand, a focus habitat that is considered for priority areas.

Conservation Action Plan (continued)

to share WLCI goals and objectives with partners and to hear about questions or concerns.

Mapping will play an integral role in the refinement process. GIS data layers such as oil and gas leasing, no surface occupancy, vegetation maps, crucial big game ranges, migration corridors, and greater sage-grouse core areas, will be incorporated into a detailed, comprehensive map that reflects partner priorities and identifies areas where WLCI may not be appropriate. An example of the refinement process is the Upper Platte River Valley. During initial LPDT meetings numerous partners

identified the entire Upper Platte River drainage as a priority, but this area was too large to address with specific actions. Through the meeting and mapping process, specific areas were identified where actions can benefit the overall landscape. The resulting product allows WLCI to better focus its efforts to localized projects that attain landscape-level conservation.



Presentation of Medicine Bow Conservation District priority areas that were included in the CAP.

Coordination Team Lead Moves On

After more than 30 years with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), including her last four as Team Lead of the WLCI Coordination Team, Renee Dana retired in early August. Her involvement in WLCI included assembling the Coordination Team into a cohesive group, facilitating the work of several WLCI teams, writing guidance to help direct WLCI work, and managing WLCI projects that received BLM funding.

Renee's efforts helped ensure participation of various parties in WLCI while building a common vision for conservation of the southwest Wyoming landscape. Her background allowed her to work well with WLCI partners by looking at the contributions each could bring to the table. She also was instrumental in navigating BLM budgets to provide funding to project proponents and leverage additional funding from cooperators.

In February 2011, Renee was recognized

for her contributions to WLCI and the BLM when the Public Lands Foundation named her the Outstanding Public Lands Professional in a Technical or Operational Field for 2010. The award was based on her outstanding professional performance addressing issues and actions involving varied greater sage-grouse habitats in southwest Wyoming. This included her exemplary vision and foresight in effectively dealing with significant public land resource challenges, exhibiting personal courage and risk taking, and making tough, controversial decisions that favor long-term land conservation and protection. Renee received the award on February 11 in a special ceremony in the **BLM Director's Office in Washington, D.C.**

In addition to leading the WLCI Coordination Team, Renee also worked as a Surface Compliance Specialist, now known as a Natural Resource Specialist,



Renee Dana on a rare day in the field.

Acting Branch Chief, National Environmental Policy Act Coordinator, and District Planning Coordinator during her decades of service as a BLM employee.

Promoting WLCI from the Top

As chair of the WLCI Executive Committee (EC), Mary Thoman could be considered the Promoter-in-Chief of WLCI. When Mary attends non-WLCI meetings, she brings WLCI materials to share the value of WLCI program, highlighting



Mary Thoman at her first meeting as chair.

how working with WLCI would help their organization.

Mary formally became chair at the EC meeting on April 20 after former WLCI Chairman and Wyoming Game and Fish Director, Steve Ferrell, vacated his position on the EC to join the staff of Governor Matt Mead. Mary seems to be taking advantage of her year as chair to push the WLCI to be more effective at serving the people who live and work within the WLCI area and to develop a more complete vision of what southwest Wyoming can be in the future.

Mary is chair of the Sweetwater County Conservation District and, for WLCI, represents the nine conservation districts that fall at least partially within the WLCI area. These conservation districts include Medicine Bow, Saratoga-Encampment-Rawlins, Little Snake, Sweetwater County, Sublette County, Star Valley, Lincoln, Uinta County, and Popo Agie.

The WLCI EC also includes BLM Wyoming Director Don Simpson as first vice-chair and Wyoming Department of Agriculture Director Jason Fearnheyough as second vice-chair.

Partner Spotlight: SER Conservation District

This spring, the Saratoga-Encampment-Rawlins Conservation District (SERCD) hosted a public information event focusing on long-range conservation planning and resources available in Carbon County. The WLCI Coordination Team and eight other contributors provided informational booths and educational materials describing the ways each organization can contribute to Carbon County conservation. The booths were sponsored by SERCD, Wyoming Game and Fish Department, Bureau of Land Management Rawlins Field Office, Wyoming Wildlife

Federation, Sleeping Giant Inc., Carbon County Planning & Zoning, Power Company of Wyoming, and WLCI.

The SERCD is a key participant in the **WLCI's Carbon Local Project Development Team** and provides conservation actions that form a foundation for additional landscape-scale conservation efforts. The SERCD information event is an example of the type of forum WLCI fully supports as it helps align the conservation missions of various groups and creates a dialogue that can improve coordination.

The event helped fulfill one of SERCD's missions of "outreach and education" by providing an informative and educational experience that supports well-informed and locally-led conservation.

Other programs and goals of the SERCD are to 1) maintain accountability of all public funds and provide professional services in a timely and responsible manner (district operations), 2) promote the wise use of tree resources, 3) provide expertise and guidance to promote healthy rangelands, 4) promote the conservation and availability of water for all beneficial uses, 5) provide leadership to maintain or improve the quality of water within all watersheds in the SERCD, 6) participate in a cooperative effort in resource enhancement and protection (environmental policy), 7) promote the conservation of soil, and 8) promote the sustainability of healthy wildlife populations and their contributions to the economic stability of the SERCD.



Jim Wasseen and Justin Caudill at the SERCD event.

The public information event included six presentations on information and resources that could be used to help with conservation efforts. Presented topics ranged from mission statements, on-the-ground actions, statute requirements, new reclamation materials, Geographic Information Systems, and resource internet tools to renewable energy development.

Supporting Conservation

The WLCI is finding new ways to facilitate and support conservation projects. WLCI helps partners complete projects that provide conservation at the landscape scale, and this commitment can go beyond financial support of projects.

In 2010, Justin Caudill of the Coordination Team was able to acquire a donation of pipe to use in the Buckhorn Well Exclusion instead of using steel jack pipe. This reduced the cost of the project by tens of thousands of dollars. He also attracted a large number of volunteer workers from local area high schools to assist with native plantings along Bitter Creek as part of Public Lands Day.

In 2011, funding provided by the Ruby Pipeline was provided to WLCI for conservation of sage-grouse and pygmy rabbits in areas near the pipeline's path in Lincoln and Uinta counties. This funding has already benefited a project studying the impacts of raven predation on sage-grouse and a project to identify priority areas for sage-grouse treatments. The Ruby funding provides a way to support

beneficial projects, without the limitations of federal funding.

In addition to projects that go through the WLCI review process, the Partners for Fish and Wildlife (PFW) program uses funds provided as part of congressional funding of WLCI for projects on private lands. These projects meet priorities identified by PFW that overlap significantly with WLCI priorities. Other partnering groups also provide work that helps landscape-scale conservation, but **that may not be a formal "WLCI project."**

Through the more typical funds, which are provided by the BLM, in 2010, WLCI and its partners funded five new projects and 20 continuing projects. Similar targets are anticipated in 2011, although conditions that are wetter than normal may limit completion of some projects.

The 2010 projects included 11,354 acres of treatments and 30,000 acres of monitoring for aspen restoration; participa-



Planting native trees at Bitter Creek.

tion in the acquisition of three conservation easements totaling 25,735 acres to protect wildlife habitat and migration corridors; converting 23 miles of fences to a wildlife-friendly standard and fencing two riparian areas; treating invasive species by inventorying 900 acres, treating 4,546 acres, and assessing treatment effectiveness on 3,960 acres; creating 10 acres of wetlands, enhancing 6 miles of stream, and completing three additional fish and waterfowl projects; and continued participation in the Seeds of Success program to collect native seeds and plant material.



Project area site visit.

Upcoming Science Activities

Planning is beginning on the 2012 WLCI Science Workshop, which is targeted for the Rock Springs area in May. Previous science workshops were held in 2007 and 2009 in Laramie, and the upcoming workshop will be designed to allow greater participation by those who live and work in the WLCI area. The hope is those attending can see how ongoing science applies to their work and can provide recommendations. Presentations will likely include a mixture of WLCI science and science that is complementary to WLCI.

The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) does work to assess conditions in the WLCI area, gather additional information about wildlife, conduct long-term monitoring data, and provide data management support. For 2012, USGS plans to continue the work it has done since 2007 and to place greater emphasis on the integrated assessment and long-term monitoring. The integrated assessment is designed to make scientific information available for planning conservation work at local levels.